

The Fourfold Gospel



A book review by Dewayne Bryant, Rush Springs, Okla.

The name J.W. McGarvey is legendary in the Restoration Movement and for good reason. A gifted biblical scholar who tirelessly opposed theological liberalism and higher criticism, McGarvey served equally well as professor and preacher. Although advances in scholarship tend to make the work of older authorities obsolete, much of McGarvey's work may still be read with great profit.

One of the most unusual of McGarvey's contributions was *The Fourfold Gospel*. Compiled with the help of Philip Y. Pendleton, the son-in-law of Alexander Campbell, McGarvey harmonized the Gospels with the intent not "to produce a commentary for the textual critic, the theologian, or the professor; but a plain and simple work for all readers of God's word." More than a simple chart or synopsis with Scripture references, *The Fourfold Gospel* weaves together the text of the Gospels in a harmony that is as unique as it is helpful.

The idea of harmonizing the Gospels is nothing new. The concept dates back at least as far as the *Diatessaron*, a second-century harmony produced by theologian and apologist Tatian (c. 120–185). What makes McGarvey's work unique is the manner in which he arranged the biblical text. Material from each Gospel is identified by an alphabetic

letter [(a), (b), (c) and (d)]. Because this feature does take some getting used to, readers will want to understand the layout of the material before digging in.

Readers may be struck by readings that seem somewhat redundant at times. This redundancy arises from the fact that McGarvey and Pendleton believed it was wrong to take liberties with the biblical text, so they, by their reckoning, omitted a mere five words from the entirety of the Gospels. This commitment does make some readings a bit difficult, such as in cases where material from all four Gospels must be included.

A particularly helpful feature of *The Fourfold Gospel* is the interjection of running commentary and explanatory notes throughout the text. In the effort to aid the reading of the Gospels apart from the commentary, the text of the biblical authors is set in bold typeface. These notes are the fruit of a lifetime of study and will be valuable to all readers. Despite the fact that this book is nearly a century old, the notes provide a wealth of information from a first-rate academician once dubbed the greatest biblical scholar on either side of the Atlantic.

The Fourfold Gospel by J.W. McGarvey and Philip Y. Pendleton, published by Guardian of Truth in 2009 (reprint). Paperback, 502 pages, 016624, \$19.95.